

Dissidences

Hispanic Journal of Theory and Criticism

Volume 4
Issue 8 *Reconciliation and its Discontents*

Article 6

November 2012

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Recommended Citation

Hite, Katherine (2012) "Inter-Generational Transmission of Grief in Paine, Chile," *Dissidences*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 8 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/dissidences/vol4/iss8/6>

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Keywords / Palabras clave

Reconciliation, Memory, Chile, Latin America, Politican Violence

DISSIDEN***CE***S

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Inter-Generational Transmission of Grief in Paine, Chile

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Until the mid-twentieth century, Paine, some thirty miles from Santiago, was a rural area constituted by large haciendas, a local aristocracy, and tenant farmers and their families. From the mid-1960s to 1973, Paine became the site of major agrarian reform, including peasant struggles to establish cooperatives carved from the haciendas. The September 11, 1973, military coup led to the swift, concerted, and deadly retaliation against Paine's leading peasant organizers and their supporters. Several Paine civilians collaborated with security forces to identify and eliminate local peasant leaders and other activists. Collaborators and families of the victims co-exist in Paine today.

Like many families in Chile, the families of the disappeared and executed of Paine have undergone long, heartbreaking journeys, through police precincts, detention centers, state ministries, politicians' offices, law firms, courts, morgues, and unmarked grave sites. In this context of conflict, loss, and pain, the relatives of the disappeared and murdered of Paine have produced an uplifting, beautiful memorial.

A thousand pine logs, minus seventy, stand tall in the Paine Memorial. The logs represent the descendants of those in Paine who disappeared and were killed. In place of the missing seventy logs are family-designed mosaics for each of the dead and disappeared loved ones, mosaics filled with icons, from tractors, watermelons, and hoes, to guitars, and soccer balls. There are also political icons signaling political party militancy. And there are several mosaics with images of a mother crying, or outstretched hands. The memorial is an expression of mourning, and the symbols are interwoven with profound grief. Yet the memorial also powerfully expresses a living memory, insisted upon by the third generation descendants of those who struggled. Those whose lives are poignantly memorialized in the Memorial of Paine were primarily agricultural workers who participated in struggles to redistribute land. The grandchildren emphasize their desire to retrieve the humanity and inspiration of their grandfathers.

Paine, Time and Trauma

In his University of Chile undergraduate history thesis, Juan René Maureira, who grew up in Paine and whose grandfather is a desaparecido of Paine, explores why the violence of 1973 struck with such dramatic force in Paine? He asks why more citizens per capita were detained-disappeared and executed in Paine than in anywhere else in Chile? [1]. To answer this, Juan René attempts to reconstruct Paine's social climate in the years leading to the coup. He

emphasizes the cultural and political significance of landholding for the Chilean elite, as well as the ways various forms of cultural and economic subordination threaded through Paine's agricultural working families. Juan René finds that until the mid-1960s, Paine was in many ways a classic mix of conviviality, gentility, paternalism, inequality, and hierarchy in a small-town and rural community. With the agrarian reform movement, this mix was broken by the creation of new peasant cooperatives on what were large landholdings, growing from agrarian workers' new sense of the possible. From this sense of the possible emerged an explosion of left-wing movements and action. Many organized alongside their families and non-militant farm workers of Paine to establish cooperatives and widespread networks of support [2].



Juan Rene Maureira

“My grandfather and his brothers were known as the wild ones, the radical ones of Rangué,” said Gabriela Ortiz, laughing. Gabi is the granddaughter of an executed peasant leader. “The Ortiz family is enormous, and our family name is like a label, we have a reputation [3].” Gabi’s grandfather and three of her great-uncles participated actively in the 1971 toma, the takeover of the Rangué hacienda, which became a model Paine peasant cooperative [4]



Gabi Ortiz

Others sympathetic to the inquilinos’ struggle, such as Juan René’s grandfather, René Maureira Gajardo, came to Paine in the 1960s. As conflict over the redistribution of land and

power intensified in Paine, René, a small grocery store owner and Socialist Party militant, worked with the cooperative organizers. Other Paine business owners deeply resented Maureira and accused him of betraying his own class interests [5]. The once tranquil climate of Paine gave way to open tension and conflict. Paine peasants defiantly sought to establish new rights. Under Juan Manuel Ortiz's leadership, the Rangué cooperative became part of the forefront of the popular power struggle.

In the month following the September 1973 coup, the four Ortiz brothers and their fellow workers continued to go each day to the cooperatives, desperately hoping that the expropriations would hold even though other Paine organizers were already being arrested: Over the course of the first week alone, thirteen of those who are now disappeared and murdered of Paine were rounded up. In the second week, there would be five more detained-disappeared. October 1973 proved Paine's most brutal month: fifty-two men were detained, disappeared, and killed. The Paine disappeared and murdered were students, agricultural workers, a handful of small businessmen, and a schoolteacher. Many were political party activists, but several who were not political militants were also murdered. Between mid-September and late October, more than 200 Paine citizens were detained and imprisoned for different lengths of time, from several days, to more than a year [6].

Grief without Mourning

When Gabi's grandfather Luis was taken away, her grandmother, Hilda Inés Cerda, was left with their seven children, including Gabi's father, the oldest, who was fourteen. The youngest child was three-months-old. To survive, the children had to be separated. Hilda went to work for a landowning family allied with those who had murdered her husband. Gabi described her family's many hardships. "At the time of the coup, the revenge against my grandfather and

great-uncle -- they were rumored to be the people who were armed – was no joke. And in my rural school as a child, in one class of twenty students, there were six Ortiz cousins, we were all known as the rebellious ones, the smart ones, the black sheep. We are, after all, the grandchildren of the Ortiz's.” [7]

The women who were the companions, wives, sisters, in-laws, and mothers of those who were abducted in Paine faced a community in fear and a regime that treated them as the enemy. Moreover, as wives and mothers, they largely disavowed their own suffering in order to continue the search and care for their families. Military and police denied their loved ones were in custody, sometimes they laughed in their faces, and at least once, during a meeting among the relatives of the detained-disappeared, police arrested four of the women. Nevertheless, neighbors and townspeople of Paine often thought as Juan René's grandmother Sonia once did, that anyone who was arrested must have done something wrong.

In December 1973, Paine families discovered the dead bodies of fourteen men, including thirteen agricultural workers and a schoolteacher. The men were dumped in another deep ravine not far from their homes, and the men's relatives followed a rumor that bodies had been found there. Amidst a harrowing encounter with the remains, the Paine families decided not to move the bodies [8]. The families worried that a public exhumation would put many at great risk. Paine families lived in close quarters, among loved ones who felt helpless and afraid, among informants both known and unknown, and among the perpetrators, many of whom were known. All were implicated, and many were suspect. The violence of Paine in 1973 was historically unprecedented. It would take years for the women of Paine to make their voices heard in the streets.

What effect did this long wait have on the wives and mothers of the men who were killed? What was their grief like? I am particularly haunted by C.S. Lewis's journal of the loss of his wife, "H," to cancer. At the time of H's death, Lewis was a renowned author and a wealthy man, possessed of "resources," which from the outset of his journal, Lewis both recognizes and dismisses, as they do him no good in "getting over" his loss [9]. For Lewis, much of his anguish following H's death leads him to question his faith in God. I am haunted because in spite of Lewis's resources and a supportive environment and society for him, and in spite of the fact that he knew H was dying, the first words of Lewis's journal decry the pure fear of grief:

No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear. I am not afraid,
but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the
stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.

(C.S. Lewis, A Grief Observed, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1961,
p. 15.)

For Lewis, grief as fear is the total uncertainty of how to proceed, how to live one's daily life in the absence of one's life's partner. Imagine, then, what the grief experienced by the families of Paine must have felt in the context of real threat, a hostile environment, and the shock of having loved ones suddenly taken away.

Students of grief recognize that there are discernible emotions that most griever experience, including shock, denial, pain, guilt, anger, depression, and loneliness. Moreover, according to the conventional wisdom, at some point the aggrieved are expected to experience "the upward turn" -- they will work through grief, they will accept, and ultimately, they will hope again. Even the most upbeat popular literature does not claim that griever experience some kind of return to a pre-tragedy life, or that happiness is just around the bend. Yet there is an

underlying assumption that grief must be overcome in order for life to continue. As I think about the grieving of Paine, I am torn about this. What is clear is that the Chilean state and society must recognize, must acknowledge the families' grievous realities.

In her jarring account, The Year of Magical Thinking, Joan Didion distinguishes between grief, that panoply of raw emotions that followed her husband's death, from mourning, which Didion sees as the more conscious act of grieving. For Didion in those months before she allowed herself to mourn, grief involved her consciously trying to banish him (and her daughter) from her mind and her memories. Obviously this proved impossible. Mourning, on the other hand, recognized that Didion needed to dwell in her memories, both because she recognized there was no way around this, and because she appreciated, consciously or not, that through mourning she would be trying to bring her husband into her world in a way that was less "irrational," "fragile," or "raw [10]."

The Paine widows, mothers, were simply unable, not allowed, did not allow themselves, to mourn. All of the symptoms of grief – shock, pain, anger, depression – were unending, even exacerbated over years by false leads, official unresponsiveness and hostility, and societal denial and numbness. How can there be “uplift” in such conditions? How can one deny the reality of the pain they suffered? And the children, those who were young, teenagers, or young men and women, grew up amidst perpetual familial traumatic grief. For this generation, anger and depression prevail, expressed privately, behind closed doors.

It would be 1989, sixteen years after the abductions, that Paine women first publicly demonstrated for truth and justice for the victims of Paine, in Paine itself. On the day of that first march, the women recount that at first there were no more than six of them in the street, and they were under pressure by the police to move to the sidewalk. The women bravely refused, and

gradually the march grew larger, numbering close to sixty or seventy men, women, and children [11].

In the post-dictatorial period, and as they became adults, the children of Paine's missing and executed joined their mothers' long struggle for truth and justice. Soon the grandchildren would also search. They were questioning the silences and the fragmented accounts at home as well as out in the world. These descendants brought fresh perspectives and ideas, and they wanted to move beyond the painful past.

Post-Memory and the Transmission of Grief

In the literature on the transmission of traumatic memories across generations, there is tension among understandings of what is received, what is conveyed, what is silent, and what is obsessively present. The challenge is to move from a focus on the generation of those who were killed, to a focus on what it is that the descendants feel, seek or demand. Marianne Hirsch writes that children of Holocaust victims "inherit a horrific, unknown and unknowable past that their parents were not meant to survive [12]." Like the second generation of Chileans, Holocaust survivors who are very young children are denied their childhood. The "bleeding" across generations captures why it might often fall to the third generation to struggle to recuperate memories beyond the painful wound of absence.

In her study of the inter-generational transmission of traumatic memories in Argentine politically militant families, Alejandra Oberti emphasizes the "active" rather than "inherited" transmission of memories, even when there is a great deal of family silence [13]. More often than not, the transmissions come in bits and pieces, sometimes contradicting one another. Psychoanalyst Jacque Hassoun's conceptualization of memories moving discursively within families across generations like "contraband," serves Oberti's study well, as she wishes to

understand what is transmitted when violence disrupts the flow [14]. Contraband memory transmission connotes clandestine activity, furtiveness, and risk. Oberti's interviews and analysis of Argentine children of the disappeared help us understand how and why new generations, in Argentina, Chile, and elsewhere, demand to know more about the lives of their parents who were killed, as well as why they are not satisfied with passive presentations of their loved ones as victims rather than subjects.

Oberti finds that the children of disappeared Argentine militants struggle to discover as much as they can about their parents, in good part to establish an "anchor" of their own origins. This desire to learn more also helps them separate, or become autonomous selves within the family, and it differentiates the children of the disappeared from others in the family who have been comparatively silent about the disappeared parents.

In Paine one sees the constancy of the search. The search for meaning is life-long, continues from generation to generation, and is not always successful. Several women who were mothers of the disappeared men of Paine died before the remains of their loved ones were unearthed. Searching implies movement, progression, even if a search may prove fitful, halting, and uncertain. Searching is about following paths, and about integrating experiences, ideas, and emotions into cognitive selves.

The once predominantly rural area experienced a brief, dramatic re-distribution of power. The military dictatorship abruptly reversed this power re-distribution. Over the past thirty years, land speculation, the commercialization of agriculture, and some modest local tourist development have characterized the region, and the town of Paine has become a bedroom community for the expanding metropolis of Santiago. Paine's physical terrain is virtually

unrecognizable from that of Paine of the 1960s and 1970s. And the peasant struggles have been erased.

Nevertheless, many of the family members remain. Juan René Maureira's grandmother Sonia still operates the grocery store. One of her two sons, Juan René's uncle Juan Leonardo, has become a local community leader, crucial to organizing the Memorial of Paine. And what began as a small, underground gathering of families of the disappeared and murdered of Paine became the strong Association of Families of the Detained-Disappeared and Executed of Paine (AFDD-Paine).

In the year 2000, as part of a halting but continuing effort to overcome their fear through collective cultural initiatives, AFDD-Paine members conducted a survey of the Paine community to determine the number of descendants directly related to the seventy men who were detained-disappeared and executed. The 2000 survey determined that from the first generation to the third generation, there were more than a thousand direct descendants of those who were disappeared and killed. The descendants would come to be symbolized in the Paine Memorial by 1,000 pine logs. The pines were cut to conceptualize the Andes horizon, an eternal feature of Chile's landscape.

The Paine memorial represents the accomplishments of three generations' long struggle to memorialize their loved ones. Nevertheless, moving from agreement to implementation and maintenance has been and continues to be a long road. For example, although the government recognized the need for "psychological accompaniment" of family members, the initial route for addressing this was unsuccessful. The government sent to Paine a group of young psychology students to lead group therapy sessions. To family members, the therapy sessions felt like a waste of time. One Paine participant recounted how families ended up having to console the

crying psychologists. Ultimately, they sent the psychology students away, and then continued the important work with the government-sponsored artists, who conceived of the mosaic project and taught the families tile making and mosaic design.

The Association of Families of the Detained-Disappeared continues to struggle to secure the basic fiscal support necessary to maintain the site. Rather than implement the group's original design for an ample meeting place and cultural center, government officials installed a shipping container – a trailer-like rectangular office structure that conveys a temporary and precarious feel.

To re-vitalize and, in an important sense, to more deeply politicize the Paine commemorative process, a group of Paine's grandchildren of the detained-disappeared and executed, including Juan René and Gabi, organized La Tercera Generación, The Third Generation. The Third Generation emphasizes beauty and joy, continuity with the past while fully celebrating the present. For the grandparents, memories of their loved ones tend to emphasize their deaths and disappearances, the grief associated with the loss, while The Third Generation urges recuperating memories of their loved ones' lived experiences in order to know them, as human beings.

In light of this long intergenerational struggle, the pastiche of the different images in the mosaics becomes powerful. The mosaic that the Maureira family made that commemorates René Maureira includes a representation of the grocery store Maureira founded, Mapa. There is a truck that represents the first truck Maureira bought with his own money. The truck also symbolizes Maureira's role as a coordinator of the JAP, the Popular Unity government-established agency that distributed basic goods amidst private sector and middle class hoarding.



Maureira Family

Grandsons Juan René and Emerson explained that during the course of making the Maureira mosaic, children and grandchildren often heard, for the first time, the stories, even the favorite jokes, of the loved ones they didn't know. Sonia remembered that once as she and her husband were reminiscing about their first little home together in Torca, she said to him, "And that's where I first served you tea, where I came to know you." And as she recounted this to the family working on the mosaic, her son, Juan René's uncle, said, "Ah, so this is where you conceived me," And the grandmother said, "Yes, this is where you came into being."

Gabriela recounted a different story in the course of the mosaic-making: One of her uncles said to her grandmother, apparently only half in jest, "Mom, where do we put a bottle symbolizing the times Dad came home drunk after a night in the bar?" Not all memories made

the cut. The mosaics communicate work, family, leisure, and political activism. Some of the mosaics have doves, others a night sky, or a crying woman, hands outreached, tears of blood.

For Juan René, the exciting, meaningful work of his generation is taking place in the arena of popular education, where university students organize workshops and courses in working-class neighborhoods to construct collective histories of the community [15]. Popular education and participatory community histories clearly inspire the Tercera Generación's efforts and hopes for the Paine Memorial. "There is still so much fear in this community," Gabi said. "You know, my uncle, whose father was murdered, has been to our memorial only once, and he always says to me to stay out of politics. I just smile at him [16]."

More recently, members of La Tercera Generación, including Gabriela and her cousins, have inserted in the mosaics small plaques with the names and a brief message from the grandchildren themselves. The mosaics of Paine not only remember individuals. In a strong sense, the mosaics construct the individuals as well, particularly as one thinks about what it means for grandchildren to participate in the remembering of men they never knew [17]. The Paine memorial materializes, it presences, what had been absence – the grief, loss, years of struggle [18].

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